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ABSTRACT

This paper describes a framework which captures the knowledge, skills, and dispositions of teacher leaders who demonstrate the ability to work effectively with students and peers in their own classrooms and beyond. Data come from 10 in-depth studies of recognized, urban, middle-school teachers. During the study, participants came together twice for 3-day conferences to facilitate reflection on their leadership qualities and how they acquired them. The process revealed some early themes about teacher leadership: the importance of subject matter knowledge, the commitment of teachers to working collaboratively, and the unique challenges of teaching other teachers versus students. Through interviews and portfolio reviews, other themes emerged: the role of reflection in teacher growth, the sense of empowerment they shared, and their enthusiasm for continually innovating in the classroom. Using teachers' feedback, a framework was developed that captured leadership qualities in four dimensions: expertise, collaboration, reflection, and empowerment. By following the teachers' career paths, the study found that as the teachers developed high levels of skill in each of the four domains, they emerged as leaders. The importance of professional development experiences in cultivating participants' expertise, collaborative and reflective skills, and sense of empowerment is noted. (Contains 24 references.) (SM)

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The Essential Knowledge and Skills of Teacher Leaders: A Search for a Conceptual Framework

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A Search for a Conceptual Framework

Introduction

Elizabeth Locke, an exemplary middle school history teacher, engaged her departmental colleagues in a transformative professional development experience by securing a school site demonstration grant. With this funding, she led her department on a six-year journey of professional learning. She was able to hire an outside educational consultant to guide her and her colleagues each week through a methodical scrutiny of their own classroom practices by using student work as the barometer of their pedagogical effectiveness. Christy Ivars, a highly skilled reading specialist, ushered in a new reading program into her middle school through the submission of a proposal to her school administration. Through her advocacy of the importance of reading instruction for all of the students in their low performing school, she succeeded in convincing her peers to go to a seven period day to allow every seventh grader to take reading. As a result, her middle school has been formally recognized by the state for making significant gains in reading achievement. And Rachel Lynn MacLeod, a middle school mathematics teacher who serves as a leader in both her district and a neighboring one, underwent a professional "Renaissance" ten years ago after almost thirty years of teaching. Since that time, she has converted her teaching practices to emphasize mathematical problem solving and the co-construction of learning between herself and her students. She has received national recognition for her rigorous interactive teaching, which has been featured as a model in videotapes produced by two national reform programs.

While these three teachers do not share expertise in the same subject-area nor have they accumulated the same the number of years of experience in the classroom, what they do share is recognition as teacher leaders by their colleagues and administrators alike. Informally, in their daily interactions with students and colleagues, these three teachers, like all of the participants in the study, function within their school contexts as educators who lead by example. And as department chairs, mentors, school committee chairs, grant writers, district committee members, and staff development presenters, etc., these teachers also fulfill formal leadership roles within their school and districts, and at the state and national level.

The phenomenon of teacher leadership, which Elizabeth, Rachel, and Christy demonstrate, is an emerging field in educational research. Over the last decade, a growing number of scholars have written about the importance of teacher leadership because of the increased recognition of the important role teacher leaders play in educational reform movements. Walling, in the introduction to Teachers *as Leaders* (1994), claims that a large flaw in the 1983 *Nation at Risk* report was that it did not recognize the importance of teachers as leaders in the education profession and in school reform. Thus, he dedicates his text to examining the notion of leadership beyond the formal authority of school and district administrators. He urges his colleagues to look more deeply into the phenomenon of teachers who lead, asserting that "educational excellence cannot be achieved without attention to teaching" (p. 5).

Patricia Walsey (1991), too, stresses the importance of teachers' growing leadership as she recounts twenty years of research that "demonstrates that teachers, too long silent and isolated in classrooms, must take more leadership in the restructuring of public education" (p. 211). Fessler

and Ungaretti (1994) predict that "meaningful school reform will not occur until teachers are recognized as full partners in leading, defining, and implementing school improvement efforts" (p. 211), for they contend that without teacher leadership the changes and improvement desired in student learning cannot be achieved. Facing the Herculean task of "making massive changes in America's schools while working within an education system that was never designed for today," Katzenmeyer and Moller (1996) echo their colleagues in describing teacher leadership as the "sleeping giant that can be the catalyst to push school reform into the next century" (p. 2). They argue that because school reform is ultimately dependent on the cultivation of teacher leaders, researchers have, in turn, begun to explore the importance of these previously under-recognized educational players.

Perhaps because it has been characterized as a central component of the latest educational reform efforts, many researchers in this field have turned their attention to investigating how it is that teacher leadership can be fostered. One group of researchers contends that teacher leadership can be encouraged or impeded, depending on school culture and climate (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 1996; Duke, 1994; Miller, 1992; Deal & Petterson, 1999). Katzenmeyer and Moller explain:

> We find schools that support teacher leadership display certain identifiable characteristics . . . Understanding these dimensions is important because organizations can [otherwise] unknowingly set up obstacles to teacher leadership. (p. 99)

These researchers report that settings in which teachers are encouraged to collaborate, to participate in school-site decision-making, to engage in on-going learning, and to reflect upon their pedagogy are the school sites that best foster the leadership of classroom practitioners.

In addition to examining the role that schools play in the development of teacher leadership, another group of researchers have also explored how professional development opportunities contribute to shaping teachers into leaders (Lambert et al, 1997; Futrell, 1994; Burke, 1994). Lambert and her colleagues (1997) reflected upon substance of professional development programs which enrich teachers' leadership skills and capacities, while Futrell (1994) and Burke (1994) considered the vital role that professional development must play in the development of teachers' leadership potential. Lambert (1997) suggests that professional development offerings which provide teachers with time and opportunity to engage with their colleagues in reflecting upon the practices of the classroom are the kinds of staff development that best encourage leadership. Moreover, Futrell (1994) reminds educators that transformative professional development experiences must be more than a "one shot deal;" they must be on-going. And Burke (1994) describes how influential professional development offerings must provide teachers with the opportunity to acquire new knowledge, to practice applying this new knowledge, to solicit the feedback of their colleagues, and to have on-going support in maintaining these newly adopted practices.

Whether the focus of these scholars' work is on the role of school culture/climate or professional development opportunities which contribute to teacher leadership, however, what seems to be missing from this body of research is an exploration of the experiences that develop leadership and the combination of experiences, skills, and expertise are accumulated by teacher leaders over many years and through many professional experiences. Very little research traces the complex

journeys that teachers undertook, over the course of their careers, to become instructional and reform leaders. And in most of these cases, researchers on teacher leadership invite policy-makers to use their findings on school culture and professional development to guide new reform initiatives designed to foster such leadership. Yet we contend that it is only once we have uncovered the coherent "curriculum" which enables teachers to undergo the professional learning and growth required to become leaders, can policy be effectively crafted to facilitate the cultivation of these composite skills, knowledge, and dispositions (Swanson, 1997).

While this body of research on teacher leadership does not provide a systemic overview of how these teachers have learned to do what they do as leaders, neither does most of this research deliberate much on exactly what is meant by the notion of teacher leadership, who exactly is included in this category, or what it looks like in practice. Instead, researchers who have delved into exploring and defining this phenomenon have either concentrated on identifying the traits that separate these educators from their peers (Yarger & Lee, 1994; Lambert et. al., 1997) or on categorizing the formal roles or positions that teacher leaders hold (Lambert et. al, 1997; Fessler & Ungaretti, 1994; Troen & Boles, 1994; Livingston, 1992; Walsey, 1991). Yarger and Lee report, for example, that teachers who possess strong interpersonal skills and who are empathetic, reflective, persistent, flexible, and willing to take risks have the makings of effective leaders. Some scholars suggest that teacher with such traits can inhabit both formal leadership roles as well as lead informally (Leithwood, 1992; Wigginton, 1992). Others recognize that there is no codified set of formal roles for teacher leaders, documenting that they hold a whole host of formal and informal roles within their schools such as department and school-committee chairs, staff development trainers, mentors, peer coaches, and/or curriculum specialists (Lieberman, 1999; Katzenmeyer & Moller, 1996). Several researchers express their concern over the lack of formal leadership opportunities available to exemplary teachers, a concern fueled, perhaps, by the trend of teacher attrition (Fessler & Ungaretti, 1994; Walsey, 1991). In all of these cases, researchers urge those involved in educational reform to expand the opportunities for teachers who want to step into formal positions of leadership while remaining classroom practitioners.

Missing from most of the research on teacher leadership is a broader conceptualization of this phenomenon, as well as a portrait of what it looks like on-the-ground and in-practice. Michael Fullan (1994) asserts that without a deeper and broader conceptualization of teacher leadership, efforts to groom it in schools will fail. He extends the exploration on teacher leadership by identifying six theoretical domains. He hypothesizes that leadership can only be fostered among teachers on a large-scale if their subject-matter, foundational, and political and knowledge base increases, if habits of critical reflection become embedded, if their skill and commitment to collaborative work improves, and if their sense of moral purpose is strengthened. In shifting the conceptualization of this phenomenon to a theoretical plane, he shifts the discussion from what teacher leadership has been, formally and institutionally, to what it could be. Fullan argues that "a wholesale transformation of the teaching profession is needed. Teacher leadership is not for a few; it is for all" (p. 246). Thus, Fullan generates, in effect, a blueprint for policy-makers and administrators intent on fostering the leadership of teachers.

In step with Fullan, Leithwood (1992) also offers a theoretical model to educational administrators and policy-makers that chronicles the growth of teachers through stages from their entry into the profession through their maturation as leaders. Drawing on the work of developmental psychology, this theorist developed a six-stage model to assist school principals in

fostering the growth and leadership of teachers. Describing a "mature teacher" as "one who plays a formal or informal leadership role, in a variety of contexts both inside and outside the classroom and school" (p. 90), Leithwood charts a sequence of competencies that a teacher would need to master in order to become a "stage-six" teacher leader. He, like Fullan, purports that in addition to high-level classroom management, assessment, and pedagogical skills, such teachers must also be reflective, collaborative, and knowledgeable about how to work for change within our educational and political systems.

While Fullans' and Leithwoods' conceptualization help us to think about the range of variables that should be considered, we still lack an empirical base for understanding how a teacher acquires the expertise needed to be an effective leader. Without a data-driven model of teacher leadership, it becomes problematic for policy-makers and administrators to know how to cultivate leadership among teachers. In this paper, we hope to extend the conversation on teacher leadership by searching for a framework which best captures the knowledge, skills, and dispositions of our participants who demonstrate the ability to work effectively with students and their peers in their own classrooms and beyond.

Our data are derived from ten in-depth case studies of recognized middle school teachers: two in each of the four core disciplines and two reading specialists. All of these teachers work in urban districts that are immersed in standards-based reform. The participants were selected because of their abilities to translate a deep understanding of their content area and high standards into effective classroom practice, and to engage their colleagues in doing the same. Our goal was to identify the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that characterize these teacher leaders who have come into prominence under standards-based reform.

Because standards reform clearly specifies what all students should know and be able to do, the implementation of such a reform requires the integration of curricular, instructional, and assessment reforms at the classroom level. This integration places new demands on teachers, for standards reform asks teachers to reconsider their orientation to teaching and learning and to ultimately evaluate the effectiveness of their teaching on the basis of the quality of student learning. Thus, this study was conceived as a way to investigate what educators have to know and be able to do to respond fully to policies that require a full-scale transformation of traditional teaching methods (Swanson, 1997).

The goal of this paper is to provide a coherent conceptualization of teacher leadership that is data-driven and to document the practices of leadership-in-action. Most researchers in the field report that their subjects are those who lead both within and beyond the classroom. Thus, consistent with others researchers (Leithwood, 1992; Walsey, 1991; Katzenmeyer & Moller, 1996; Lambert et. al., 1997) we define teacher leaders as those who are exemplars in their classrooms, effective coaches of their peers, and change agents who contribute to school, district, state, and national educational reform.

Staying anchored to the reality of the daily classroom practice is essential for teacher leaders because their authority cannot rest on the basis of formal positionality and, instead, must stem from their credibility as expert classroom practitioners.[1] In the era of educational reform, when

[1] During the course of this study, one of the participants became a vice principal. She has remained in the study

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policy makers must ultimately look to teachers for the success of their initiatives to improve student learning, it makes sense that exemplary teachers would be looked to by policy-makers and educators alike for guidance and direction. Walsey (1991) notes that teachers have been coached for too long by those who are no longer tethered to the day-in and day-out rhythms of the classroom. Teacher leaders, on the other hand, set themselves apart from consultants and district and state level administrators because they offer their peers the wisdom of practical experience and observable success in the classroom.

Kouzes and Posner (1993) provide important insights into the nature of credibility by distinguishing it from the authority that leaders are granted through formal positioning.

> Credibility, like reputation, is something that is earned over time. It does not come automatically with the job or the title. Establishing credibility is built brick by brick. (p. 25)

Moreover:

> [Credibility] is not something that a boss can demand. It is something that people choose to grant to a leader who has earned it. The people's choice is based not upon authority, but upon the leader's perceived capacity to serve a need. (p. 9)

In education, the credibility of middle school teacher leaders stems from competence. Kouzes and Posner report that only with a "track record" of accomplishment in any given field, can one hope to claim credibility as a leader. For middle school teacher leaders, competence in one's subject matter area, pedagogical content knowledge, and classroom management skills constitute the foundation upon which credibility rests (Lambert et. al. 1997; Leithwood, 1992; Walsey, 1991).[2]

In this paper as we examine what these exemplary teachers know how to do with their students, we explore what sets them apart from their peers as leaders and gives them on-going credibility in their work with their colleagues and school and district administrators. It is our hope that by looking across the cases of our ten participants we can identify the variables that constitute middle school teacher leadership. To understand this complex phenomenon, we have struggled with developing a conceptual framework that illuminates the essential practices of teacher leadership-in-action. The next section of the paper is dedicated to chronicling our search, and the final section is dedicated to presenting our subsequent findings about the principle dimensions of teacher leadership.

The Search for a Reflective Tool

During the two years of the study, while teachers were readily able to describe their classroom practices and the beliefs and values that guide their pedagogy, it was, however, difficult for them to articulate the leadership qualities they possess and how they acquired these skills. To continue

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despite her administrative positioning because we believe that she demonstrates an orientation to teaching and learning that manifests an on-going focus on the classroom.

[2] As a study of middle school teacher leaders, subject matter competence has emerged as one particularly salient issue with this group of teachers; however, it is not clear from this research how salient subject matter expertise would be as a central element of teacher leadership at the primary-level.

to probe this issue, we searched for a conceptual framework that could be used as a reflective tool to prompt them in going deeper in thinking about what they know and believe and how they have acquired their competence not only as teachers but as leaders. We hoped that this reflective tool would ultimately help guide us as researchers in articulating the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that are essential to teacher leadership.

Perhaps this probing proved difficult because no one had ever asked them to identify what makes them leaders, and thus these teacher leaders struggled to delineate what qualifies them as such to those around them. It is interesting to note that while all of our participants can trace the genesis of their commitment to teach, few of them reported being equally conscious of a desire to lead. Most revealed that they had forged ahead in their careers as educators because they were fueled by their identities as teachers and their work with children, and that becoming a leader had "just happened" and thus had caught them almost by surprise. As a result, these teacher leaders struggled to articulate aspects of themselves and their work that have become ingrained as the things they "just do."

To help facilitate their reflection, all of the participants in the study were brought together for a three-day conference at the end of the first and second year of data collection. The research team organized the first conference to focus on utilizing "the collective expertise of the group to engage in scrutinizing and elaborating the data collected during the first year of the study" (Swanson, 1998). This process revealed some early themes about teacher leadership: the importance of subject-matter knowledge, the commitment of these participants to working collaboratively, and the unique challenges of teaching other teachers versus students, which surfaced as the issue of credibility. The research team built upon the findings of the first conference by focusing with participants more extensively on the question of leadership during the second year of data collection. Through interviews and a review of their professional portfolios, several additional themes emerged: the role of reflection in their growth as educators, the sense of empowerment shared by these teachers which distinguishes them from many of their peers, and their enthusiasm for continually innovating in their classrooms.

Many of these themes seemed to map onto the five "States of Mind" in Costa and Garmston's *Cognitive Coaching* (1994). Written for school practitioners, the Cognitive Coaching model provides readers with a "guide for enriching thinking about teaching practice" (p. *vi*). Reading as a kind of "how-to" guide for educators who are invested in affecting "profound changes" in their classroom, school, and district communities, the authors report that any member of a school community can become instrumental to the improvement process.

Claiming that cognitive coaching can work as a "prime catalyst" for the development of improved schools and higher student learning outcomes, the authors describe an agent in the school improvement process that reminded us of our teachers. Describing the "Five States of Mind" as the foundational underpinnings of the cognitive coaching process, Costa and Garmston identified flexibility, consciousness, interdependence, efficacy, and craftsmanship as the five "internal resources" that each individual can cultivate in themselves in order to stimulate change and growth in others and in the system surrounding them. In our final analysis, however, we found the language of cognitive coaching to be too cumbersome, and we found that Costa and Garmston's categories were neither mutually exclusive nor concrete enough to capture the practical expertise of our participants. We also found the "Five States of Mind" to be too focused on the dispositions and not focused enough on the knowledge and skills of individuals to fully

serve our purposes. Therefore, we opted to modify their model to better reflect the language and experiences of our teachers.

We used this adapted conceptual framework as an analytic tool to help teachers reflect upon the phenomenon of teacher leadership during the Second Teacher Leader Conference (June, 1999). We asked participants to evaluate with us how well our version of the "Five Dimensions of Teacher Leadership" captured their understanding of what they know and are able to do. Hypothesizing that only when teachers develop a high level of *empowerment*, *expertise*, *reflection*, *collaboration*, and *flexibility* could they function effectively as leaders, we used the conference to reflect upon and to test this hypothesis with our participants. A brief description of the five dimensions which were presented to them is as follows:

1. *Empowerment* - Empowered teachers are confident in their ability to make a difference in student learning. They exhibit a high degree of agency through their willingness to take risks and to "step up to the plate," and their resourcefulness as problem solvers. Teachers who are empowered are characterized as optimistic, determined, and self-actualized. At the highest levels, these teachers are skilled in empowering others.

2. *Expertise* - Fueled by a passion for their subject area, expertise in teaching requires deep pedagogical content knowledge. These teachers have a keen understanding of their students' cognitive and developmental capacities and they are skilled at creating varied and rich curriculum to motivate and challenge their students. Expert teachers understand the goals or standards that must be met -- they are able to analyze where their students are now and where they need to go. They can break their teaching down into manageable and well-sequenced mini-lessons to scaffold student learning towards meeting learning goals. These teachers are marked by a commitment to rigor and high expectations for themselves and their charges. Expert teachers seek out on-going opportunities to enhance and refine their craft.

3. *Reflection* - Reflective practitioners are able to discern what is happening in the classroom and adapt their efforts by understanding the perspectives of others, while, at the same time, being conscious of their own values, thoughts, and biases. Committed to improving one's teaching by using reflection as a vehicle towards change, reflective teachers are willing to ask themselves, "how can I change to improve the situation?" Or, "what can I do differently?" thus requiring a high degree of agency and personal responsibility. Such practitioners are committed to entering into reflective dialogue with their colleagues as a regular component of their professional lives.

4. *Collaboration* - Characterized by a high degree of collegiality and cooperation, collaborative teachers value consensus and compromise rather than competition. They recognize that collective expertise offers the possibility of generating optimal solutions to the complex problems of teaching and learning. Such teachers demonstrate strong communication skills, such as inquiry and active listening. Collaborative teachers position themselves to be purposefully accessible to their students and peers.

5. *Flexibility* - Flexible teachers understand that teaching is an art and a science, requiring innovation and improvisation along with structure and planning. It indicates a high tolerance for ambiguity, because flexible individuals trust that they can respond and adapt as they go. They are also highly creative, relying on their intuition as well as more formal cognitive abilities.

After introducing this conceptual framework to our participants on the second day of the conference, we then led them through a series of exercises designed to test the usefulness of the proposed framework for defining teacher leadership. We also introduced journey maps[3] to prod participants' thinking about their capacities in each of these five dimensions and to articulate how they acquired their impressive knowledge and skills. Designed to be a tool to promote "inquiry and reflection," a journey map is a visual record of past experiences and the relationship among these events, and it is also a powerful way to showcase the evolution of an individual's personal and/or professional path.

To graphically represent the experiences of our teachers, we assembled individual journey maps for each of our participants. On each journey map, we used different colored "stickies" to chart their career experiences across seven categories: personal milestones, formal education, professional development opportunities, classroom teaching experience, mentors, leadership/administrative roles, other professional experience, and awards. We constructed the maps based on what we had learned from their portfolios, transcripts from the 1998 teacher leader conference, researchers' field notes, interview transcripts, and their resumes.

After presenting the participants with "drafts" of their career journeys, we enlisted their help in editing their maps by providing us with dates for all entries, moving entries around to maintain chronological accuracy, and adding any missing information or entries. On the second day of the conference, teachers were prompted to annotate their journey maps by indicating which experiences contributed the most to their growth and development in each of the five proposed dimensions of teacher leadership. As homework on the second night of the conference, participants were asked to reflect in writing upon which dimension of teacher leadership they felt the most confident and how they had gained a high level of skill in this area, and, inversely, the dimension towards which they felt the least confident and why. Finally, on the last day of the conference, we divided participants into two groups to examine what kinds of patterns emerged when looking across each other's journey maps.

Working closely with journey maps over the three days of the conference confirmed for us that our proposed framework was helpful in clarifying our thinking about teacher leadership. The majority of our teacher leaders cited empowerment as one of their areas of strength. Surprisingly, a significant number of them identified subject-matter expertise as one of their weakest dimensions; however, teachers who had done graduate work in their content area felt that expertise was one of their strongest dimensions. Several participants cited reflection as their greatest strength as a teacher leader. Collaboration turned out to be an area of weakness for many teachers, as did flexibility. It was noteworthy to discover that while all of the participants who described themselves as empowered claimed that they felt confident of their abilities to work successfully in improving student learning, the teacher leaders who identified empowerment as their weakest area indicated that they were not yet confident of their abilities to empower their colleagues.

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[3] For a full description of journey maps, see The Regional Laboratory for the Educational Improvement of the Northeast and the Islands. (1994).*Creating New Visions for Schools: Activities for Educators, Parents, and Community Members* [Brochure]. Andover, MA: Sponsored by the US Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement.

We also found that the journey map activities helped illuminate the process by which our participants acquired competency in each of the five dimensions of teacher leadership. Participants indicated that professional development opportunities contributed greatly to the growth of their expertise and sense of empowerment. Workshops, institutes, and training through which participants expanded their content, pedagogical, curricular, or assessment skills increased their expertise; district standards committee work empowered a significant number of participants to work for improvement and reform. It also became apparent the important role that mentors played in their career development. Only one teacher leader felt that her initial teacher education program made a noteworthy contribution to the development of her skills; graduate education experience, on the other hand, generally made considerable contributions to the development of the teachers' subject-matter expertise. A few participants noted that personal milestone events, such as divorce, travel, and/or job transfers, functioned as a catalyst for reflection. And several participants revealed that their flexibility was stretched and shaped by formative classroom teaching experiences, while for several others serving as department chairs and/or in other school-level leadership roles nurtured and expanded their collaboration skills.

As participants reflected upon their own experiences as teacher leaders, they confirmed our hope that the proposed framework could be useful in highlighting the knowledge and skills that are essential to teacher leadership. Through their participation in this series of reflective exercises, they reached a new level of clarity in their own thinking about teacher leadership, discovering that the primary challenge in conceptualizing teacher leadership is in distinguishing exemplary teaching from teacher leadership.

Participants noted, for example, that while being a good, even wonderful teacher, emanates from a sense of personal empowerment, a solid grounding in subject-area knowledge, the ability to respond to one's students in a flexible way, and an orientation to reflect continually on the progress of students, such teachers can seclude themselves in their own classroom -- whereas being a teacher leader implies that one is committed to extending their influence beyond the classroom. The dilemma was how to navigate this role in which their credibility stems from their excellence in working with children while, at the same time, due to this expertise they are increasingly pulled away from the classroom. Thus, a consensus emerged among participants that while expertise, empowerment, reflection, collaboration, and flexibility are essential ingredients to good, and even exemplary teaching, our framework did not adequately capture the knowledge and skills that are essential to instructional leadership and/or change agency. Among participants, there was growing recognition throughout the conference that leadership ultimately rests on some additional elusive qualities which they could not quite pin down and which our framework did not yet include.

To expand our inquiry into how to distinguish exemplary teaching from teacher leadership, we prompted participants to reflect on the characteristics of educational leaders by comparing these insights with the current research on the characteristics most admired in leaders in the business field.[4] In her final interviews with the teacher leaders in the spring of the second year of data collection, the primary investigator had asked participants to list the qualities possessed by the

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[4] For a full account of this research, see: Kouzes, J.M., & Posner, B.Z. (1995). *The Leadership Challenge*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

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individuals whom they admired as effective educational leaders. In these interviews, teacher leaders cited a wide range of qualities that did not suggest much consensus; business researchers, on the other hand, found that innovating, risk-taking, envisioning, enabling, modeling, and encouraging as the cornerstone practices of effective leadership (Kouzes & Posner, 1995). After much discussion, the majority of the teachers in the group concluded that expertise, or competence, is the dimension most essential to teacher leadership, asserting that it serves as the foundation of good teaching from which leadership springs. In addition, a significant number of teachers cited empowerment as a dimension that is essential to leadership. Drawing from the business literature, participants agreed that vision was also essential for teacher leadership; for without a vision of the goals towards which one is striving, they contended, one cannot be effective in achieving them.

At the close of the conference we reached a consensus that the phenomenon of teacher leadership can, indeed, be broken down into a set of practices, i.e. knowledge, skills, or dispositions, and we concluded that while exemplary teaching is the foundation of teacher leadership there is more to leadership than our initial framework captured. Our initial "draft" proved useful as a reflective tool to assist in probing into the phenomenon of leadership with our participants. We ended the three-day conference with a renewed charge to go back through the entire data set to review whether or not our revised model did, indeed, suitably reflect the data. Upon reviewing participants' interviews, portfolios, journey maps, and the session transcripts in the months following the final conference, we found that expertise, collaboration, reflection, and empowerment are, as previously hypothesized, essential elements of teacher leadership. However, rather than appearing as a building block of teacher leadership in itself, we found that flexibility manifests itself, instead, as essential in many realms of teacher leadership, such as instructional adaptability, collaborating with colleagues, and working for change. We also confirmed, as our participants had suggested, that vision is an additional component of teacher leadership.[5] In the remainder of this paper, we provide evidence documenting how this revised framework captures our data on teacher leadership-in-action in the dimensions of expertise, collaboration, reflection, and empowerment.

Testing Our Proposed Framework

We contend that it is because these teachers have developed high levels of *expertise*, *collaboration*, *reflection*, and *empowerment* that they have become leaders in their departments, schools, and districts. We found substantial evidence in our data documenting the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that comprise teacher leaders' capacities in these four areas. In this final section of the paper, I present the data that describes what these four dimensions look like in practice.

Expertise

Embodying a passion for their subject and a commitment to on-going learning, these participants exhibit an impressive depth of knowledge in their field and demonstrate how the cultivation of

[5] For a full explication of the documentation of this final dimension, see: Swanson, J. (2000, April). *What differentiates an excellent teacher from a teacher leader?* Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association; New Orleans, LA.

such expertise[6] opens the door for teachers to assume leadership roles. The teachers in this study set themselves apart from many of their peers by their high level of expertise in their particular content domain. Oscar Johnson explained, for example, how his deep knowledge of history spills over into his daily interaction with his colleagues; "I'm a resource for materials, a sounding board for ideas, and a source of judgment about difficult issues." His classroom, like many of the teachers in this study, overflows with books, curricular, and other reference materials, thus functioning as a kind of active archive for his students, for those who teach down the hall, and for many other colleagues across the district. For all of the participants in this study, their credibility as exemplary teachers and as teacher leaders stems from their cumulative expertise.

Formal coursework in a content domain provided a strong foundation for their entry into the profession and for our participants' maturation as teachers. One participant was en route to a Ph.D. in history when he decided to switch tracks and teach social studies in middle school. Another participant received her teaching credential in reading/language arts concurrently with a Master's degree in reading before becoming a reading specialist at her middle school. Several of the participants credit strong undergraduate training in their subject as the base of their expertise, and several others have pursued advanced degrees in their content-area to deepen their mastery of subject. While formal education has been important, many rich professional development opportunities have also contributed significantly to the development of these teachers' expertise. These professional development offerings created opportunities for participants to immerse themselves in intensive exploration of a particular facet of their subject area or to gain greater overall knowledge in a content-area that they had not formally studied in college. Rachel, for example, credits the *Connected Math Project* with "waking" her up to "connections in mathematics that [she] had never seen before." Annie Hoffman described how a summer History Institute at a nearby university allowed her "to study history again and learn more about cultures from experts in the field."

While such experiences as the *Connected Math Project*, a state *History Project*, or *Reading Recovery* helped to deepen the understanding of participants in their subject-area, other types of professional development experiences also provided participants with the opportunity to expand their pedagogical, curricular, and/or assessment knowledge. Thus, experiences such as *Write to Learn*, the *PACE* (Performance Assessment Collaboration for Education) project at Harvard, and Ruth Mitchell's *Institute on Rubrics and Assessment* were cited by participants as seminal in the enrichment of their "pedagogical content knowledge."[7] Oscar, for example, explained how exposure to *Writing to Learn* advanced his teaching by introducing him to new pedagogical skills:

> I already knew enough content. Content wasn't the problem. The problem was how to set up learning situations so the kids are productive, engaged and feel like they're accomplishing what they need to accomplish. So that was a big help.

These teacher leaders demonstrate the importance of pedagogical content knowledge as a specialized form of teacher expertise. Their extensive subject matter knowledge provides them with the foundation from which to make informed choices about what components of their

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[6] To review our working definition of expertise, please refer to page nine.

[7] For further exploration of the notion of "pedagogical content knowledge," see Shulman, L.S. (1987). Knowledge and teaching: Foundations of the new reform. *Harvard Educational Review, 57* (1), 1-21.

content-area are important to teach to their middle school students, and how to design powerful curriculum. With extensive subject matter knowledge and a broad command of instructional strategies, these participants are able to actively engage their students in learning the basic core skills of their disciplines.

As an illustration of such expertise, language arts teacher Kathy Sullivan led her students successfully through all the steps of the writing process. To ensure that all of her students could successfully portray an autobiographical incident, which was the final assignment of a "Growth and Change" unit, she provided her students with a scoring rubric to make the evaluation criteria of the assignment explicit. Equipped with some getting started strategies, these students had opportunities to brainstorm their ideas, solicit the feedback of their peers on their incidents, and revise their first drafts for final evaluation. By conceptualizing the role of the teacher as a facilitator for her students' learning, Kathy recognizes the central importance of crafting her assignments so that she can give them "a clear idea of my objectives and a precise method for getting to [our] destination." By scaffolding the assignment and providing scoring guides, this participant focused on cultivating the skills necessary for effective writing rather than the final product. Students learned effective strategies of peer editing, helping each other "show, not tell," making their stories come alive. And by laying out the steps of the writing process, she empowered her students to create a final product of which they could all be proud. The example of this expert teacher leader reveals how pedagogical content knowledge is thus the "special amalgam of content and pedagogy that is uniquely the province of teachers, their own special form of professional understanding" (Shulman, 1987; p. 8).

To become expert teachers, the participants in this study have also had to acquire a sophisticated developmental awareness of preadolescents and to develop a "big picture" understanding of the purposes of schooling and standards. Amber Hocking explains how she can "speak with authority because I know what's important; I have a good idea, a better idea than most teachers, about what's important and what isn't." Guided by this sense of purpose and an equally strong sense of rigor, our participants can align their curriculum, instruction, and assessment to meet local and state standards, and they can distinguish between high quality and low quality student work. Because of their strong knowledge of standards, development, pedagogy, assessment, and content, all of our participants have demonstrated their expertise through their ability to effectively scaffold their students' learning and to address weaknesses to help all students meet standards.

Active in their district, state, and national professional networks, these participants also demonstrate that they are current on the issues and direction of reform. Many stay abreast of the current research in their fields, present at local and national conferences, initiate staff development training for their school and district colleagues, and contribute to professional journals and publications. Most of our participants have served as department chairs, and many have been acknowledged by their colleagues formally through prominent local, state, and national awards and appointments. For example, one participant was selected to serve on a state textbook committee, another serves as a research assistant on an NSF funded project to develop science curriculum, and several others work as consultants to schools across their district and beyond. In addition, one participant serves as an adjunct faculty member at a local state university due to her recognized expertise in reading.

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In all of these cases, participants are confident that they perceive the larger educational context that shapes day-to-day classroom teaching, and they generously pass this perspective and information along to their colleagues. Because of the base of expert knowledge that each participant possesses, they have successfully written Demonstration Grants or launched at their sites such efforts as school Literacy Academies, Curriculum and Standards Academies, and Assessment Institutes. For all of these teachers, they became leaders in their school and district communities because of their track record of accomplishment stemming, in large part, to their vast expertise. Thus, expertise, emerges clearly from the data as the first essential dimension of teacher leadership.

Collaboration

Once teachers develop expertise in a particular content domain, they are able to contribute a wealth of insights when collaborating with their colleagues. All of the participants recognize that their ability to reach a diverse array of students would be severely impaired without the acquisition of a commitment to collaboration[8] and working effectively with ones' adult peers; for they acknowledge that they can only meet the needs of all their students if they can tap into more than their own individual expertise. Without exception, these teachers report that the most immediately accessible resource they all have is the wisdom and experience of their colleagues. Samuel Tuttle, for example, explained how important it was to him to have occasions to meet with other science teachers simply to "play with ideas with colleagues." He characterized the fruit of these interactions as the uncovering of their "collective expertise," thus fostering the development of his own content-knowledge or pedagogy through the shared experiences and knowledge of his peers. Whether it means grabbing time to meet informally as peers around a brown-bag lunch table or advocating formally for shared planning time with staff members from their departments and/or grade level, all of the teacher leaders in this study are proactive in their search for and creation of opportunities for collaboration.

Perhaps because the culture and organization of many schools does not readily foster the spirit of collaboration, all of the participants cited professional development opportunities as the primary source of their active commitment to carving out time and space to work with their colleagues. For these teachers, it was during intensive summer professional development trainings, when they had the chance to work outside the isolation of their own classrooms in the company of other committed peers, that they discovered the joy of collaboration. For three of the teachers, *Write to Learn*, because it was a school wide initiate, provided a forum for teachers to come together and develop a "common language" for working as a team. Kathy reported that sharing the experience of this training "made us cohesive and fostered that collegiality" by making evident the common purpose or focus that linked her and her colleagues together in their daily classroom interactions with students. And other professional development opportunities such as state university sponsored history institutes, SPAN (Science Partnership Articulation Networking), and/or PACE brought teachers together with "experts" to interact and grow from one another through developing shared curriculum for their classrooms.

Along with professional development opportunities, these teachers cite leadership roles as the second most influential source in the development of their collaboration skills. Due, perhaps, to the powerful impact of these professional development experiences, most of the participants in

[8] To review our working definition of collaboration, please refer to page ten.

this study have used their influence as leaders to recreate the practice of collaborative curriculum-building at their own school sites. As department chairs, chairs of their school instructional councils, members of their site PQR (Program Quality Review) leadership teams, site grant coordinators, and mentors these participants have fostered collaboration by creating opportunities to work with their colleagues to design a range of curriculum and assessment tools, such as: departmental scoring rubrics, units and lesson plans and materials, spiraled curricular materials, and resource binders.

Half of the participants also credited an influential mentor as instrumental in the cultivation of their collaborative skills. Oscar, for instance, mentioned the impact of a former colleague of his in the history department in the middle school where he began teaching. He described how this veteran colleague encouraged him to freely use his teaching materials -- a habit and practice that Oscar now perpetuates with his newer departmental and school colleagues. In addition, the two reading specialists in the study both referred to their classroom teaching experiences wherein they worked closely one-on-one with other teachers as highly influential in the development of their collaborative skills. Kate Washington, for example, acknowledged that her early years of team-teaching with another more experienced teacher instilled in her a commitment to collaboration that has spanned the thirty-plus years of her career. She remarked that as a teacher leader, it is one's active responsibility to bring other teachers into opportunities for collaboration such as she experienced early in her career. Whether it was a departmental peer, principal, or district curriculum leader, all of the participants referred to such colleagues as significant in the development of their collaborative skills, for they modeled for our teacher leaders how important collaboration could was in broadening the range of ones' professional skills.

Commited to actively sharing materials and co-producing curricular materials with their colleagues, these teacher leaders seek out opportunities to collaborate with their peers on conference presentations and in creating professional development offerings at their schools sites. In addition, they advocate for the institutionalization of collaborative forums at their schools. Annie, for instance, pushed to implement a common prep period at her school; Christy, in turn, instigated the formation of a staff book club at her school to provide her colleagues and her with a monthly occasion to gather and interact closely as adult professionals. In her work as a consultant for *Write to Learn*, Kathy facilitated the follow up meetings of summer participants, ensuring that they had continued opportunities for collaboration and dialogue. Sammi Hobbes and a colleague insisted that their appointments as department chair for the ELD (English Language Development) and Language Arts departments be shared as a joint, collaborative assignment. In all of these instances, the participants contributed greatly to shaping the culture at their school sites into more collaborative learning communities.

Why is collaboration so important to the teacher leaders in this study? Annie explained her emphasis on its importance:

> It is real important to have people who you can be in contact with, because teaching can be very isolating. . . . Here we do work together, we spent time writing curriculum together, we sort of have ongoing relationships that we're in and out of each other's classrooms, we talk about what we do, and we share the kids' work. It's those kind of ongoing conversations that we seem to have that

> keeps us stimulated. . . It was in a setting of collegiality not competition that we thrived.

Annie articulates the strong collaborative orientation of her colleagues in this study. Both Elizabeth Locke and Oscar indicated that the selection of teaching sites was conditional upon the collaborative culture of the school. Oscar returned to his middle school, after a stint as a high school history teacher, because he missed the close interactions with his colleagues. All in all, the participants in this study refuse to accept the often isolating nature of classroom teaching, insisting upon contributing to and often leading collaborative efforts at their school. They work to claim time and space to congregate with their colleagues to talk, design curriculum, look at student work, and brainstorm school-wide change and reform possibilities. An important source of intellectual stimulation and growth that enhances their own expertise, the data demonstrate that collaboration is an essential dimension of teacher leadership. For it is professional interaction with other dedicated educators that stimulates thoughtful reflection about current practices and future possibilities as they strive toward educational excellence and change.

Reflection

Whether by joining with their colleagues to analyze student work or through looking closely at student data, these participants reveal the critical importance of reflection[9] another essential dimension of teacher leadership. Rather than assume that a student performs poorly on an assignment or test because they have made an inadequate effort, all of the participants acknowledge that they must continually reflect upon their own direct role in effecting student learning and achievement. Thus, these teacher leaders demonstrate how reflection, combined with their expertise and commitment to collaboration, enables them to fully engage a diverse array of students and, subsequently, to help their students meet the districts' performance standards.

These participants engage in critical pedagogical reflection by asking themselves hard questions such as: Does it meet the standard? If it doesn't meet the criteria -- why not? Was it the assignment or the skill level of the student? How could I better scaffold the assignment next time to bring the student fully along? Sammi explained it this way:

> Kids really explain it to us . . . we're looking at student work every time we talk about something, and how we use it, how it helps us make teaching decisions, and what we need to do next.

Reflection begins with the willingness of these teachers to critically examine their own practices, continues through a collegial process of questioning pedagogical and curricular choices, evaluating who is served or not served by these choices, and culminates in the adjustment of the teachers' practices to better meet the needs of all their students. Elizabeth commented; "To really grow, you have to view teaching as a process and be open to critical feedback."

Many of the teachers in the study have either formed or participated in a gathering of their peers who function as their "critical friends." When these participants assemble with their colleagues to discuss student work, they do not concentrate on codifying the deficiencies of the students who are struggling; instead, they compare the standards at which they are aiming with the student

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[9] To review our our working definition of reflection, please refer to page ten.

work in front of them and try to make sense, together, of the discrepancies between their students' performance and the quality of student work they want. They see that the purpose of reflection is to better serve the students who struggle to keep pace with their peers by identifying ways that instruction and the scaffolding of assignments could improve. Elizabeth contends that reflecting on student work is the "ultimate intervention [to help] low performing students to succeed" because it makes concrete what students have not yet learned adequately, which then allows teachers to "readjust" their instruction to better accommodate the needs and the pace of all learners. A significant number of participants indicated, too, how by coming together with their colleagues to reflect upon the work of students, they had created the opportunity for improved student learning and achievement at each of their sites.

Teachers who have a strong grasp of their subject matter, strong pedagogical skills, and a strong developmental awareness of kids are better able to diagnose the cause of students' underperformance and thus identify appropriate interventions for such students. Therefore, these teachers demonstrate that the greater their pedagogical content knowledge is, the more powerfully focused their reflection can be. However, our participants have also revealed that reflection is the practice through which many of them have come to recognize when they have insufficient content knowledge and need to learn more, thus serving as a powerful catalyst for personal and professional growth. Oscar suggested that it is "the teacher who can look at their lessons, ask questions, and sort through the process of self-criticism and peer discussion" who can "fine tune" their teaching to successfully meet standards with all of their students.

From where did the participants in this study acquire the skills and the disposition of reflection? As was the case with expertise and collaboration, professional development experiences provided our teachers with the opportunity to cultivate their reflective skills. Whether is was participating in the *PACE* project at Harvard, *EDC's Leadership Institute* (Education Development Center), *Write to Learn*, or a state demonstration grant, many of these teachers credit powerful professional development opportunities with enhancing their reflective capacities. Such opportunities pushed participants to stretch themselves beyond their comfort zones, driving them to question themselves about many of their routine classroom practices. Annie illustrates the impact of her immersion in the PACE project on the development of her reflective skills when she commented that the experience "left me with more questions than answers, but [they] were good kinds of questions." Kathy, too, was pushed to ask herself hard questions about her teaching when she was nudged out into the streets of Cambridge, Massachusetts to act as a journalist during her tenure with the PACE project, thus requiring her to think about classroom dynamics and her pedagogical choices from an alternative perspective. Rachel credits EDC's Leadership Institute with coaching her to "think of alternatives that never would have occurred to me before," thus empowering her with new, reflective problem solving skills.

In the end, perhaps the key to reflection is not only a willingness to engage in critical and collaborative dialogue with their peers; creative problem-solving and a solid self-understanding are also necessary components of reflective practice. Rachel, for example, described her definition of reflection as:

> Knowing oneself vis-à-vis the students and who they might be and all the possibilities. . . We [often] miss the mark badly, but we pull ourselves up with

> Knowing oneself vis-à-vis the students and who they might be and all the possibilities. . . We [often] miss the mark badly, but we pull ourselves up with good humor and introspection and decide how can it be better. Where can we go from here?"

For all of the participants in the study, by acquiring the habit and the skills of reflection they became better equipped to solve the complex problems facing them as teachers in diverse, urban, middle school classrooms. Because of their expert grasp of their subjects and their collaborative orientation, they cultivated their reflective capacities to their colleagues towards a renewed commitment to engaging all of their students in rigorous learning. It is also the combination of these skills that lead to teacher empowerment.

Empowerment

Armed with expert knowledge and both collaborative and reflective skills, our teacher leaders are fueled by confidence and a sense of enthusiasm about what is possible in a well-led classroom. Thus, all of the participants embody a sense of empowerment through their teaching and in their interactions with their colleagues. Every participant in the study revealed that they teach because they believe they can make a difference. Filled with this belief, the teachers in this study demonstrate how personal conviction can create a potent force for growth and change. Kathy reported that she fell in love with teaching when she realized:

> That you're the only one who can make a difference in the classroom and you're the only person and the only way that good change will happen at a school . . . [I mean] I realized that I was totally in power . . . I mean it was a great feeling.

For all of these teacher leaders, professional development opportunities proved important in the cultivation of their sense of empowerment. For many, specialized offerings in authentic assessment and curriculum development provided them with new skills and knowledge to retool and reorient their teaching. Rachel explained how the accumulation of these many, powerful experiences transformed her teaching:

> Number one is that without my own training, I could not possibly learn to do the many things that I (now) do . . .they gave me the empowerment to reorder not just my classroom but myself I would say.

For others, the implementation of district standards and the opportunity to work on a district standards committee also proved to be an important source of empowerment. Leann Miller described how the presence of the district standards in science empowered her teaching:

> I know exactly where I'm going . . . (and) I can tell you exactly what the content is that I want them to know at the end. It makes me feel pretty confident because I know I'm doing what I'm supposed to be doing.

Armed with a sense of personal empowerment, these teachers demonstrated their ability to coach their students towards academic success. Sammi contends that teachers are really coaches who must break a concept down by starting with the pre-basic skills -- without losing sight of the

standards students must meet. By breaking the learning process down into small enough pieces that her students can stay with her, one task at a time, until they have the ability to put the pieces together as a whole themselves, she, like many of her peers in the study, empowered her students to achieve:

> It's almost as if scaffolding is the project itself," she reports, "it helps them structure [since] they don't know how to break it down . . . the challenge in working with students is to structure assignments so that given what they already know, they have enough support to successfully move along the learning continuum. It takes a very delicate balance to keep the work rigorous but not overwhelming.

Bolstered by their success in empowering their students, most of these participants have also demonstrated their abilities to effectively empower their colleagues. As department chairs, mentors, staff developers, conference presenters, and grant coordinators, these teacher leaders shared the strategies that have accounted for their own classroom success with their peers.

Several of the teachers in the study, coordinated a grant through the proposal and implementation process, which empowered them to lead the reform efforts at their schools. Christy coaxed the administrators at her school to adopt a new school-wide reading program by submitting a strong proposal, while Rachel and Elizabeth utilized a state demonstration grant process to acquire funding to support reform initiatives at their school sites that would provide opportunities to enhance the staff's pedagogical content knowledge and provide time for collaboration and reflection.

Kathy, for example, worked as a *Writing to Learn* consultant with teachers in a high poverty district in the Deep South. In the final evaluations of this professional development experience, one participant expressed her thanks to Kathy, crediting her with "stretching my ability as a teacher." Working as a mentor teacher, Sammi, too, demonstrated her capacity to empower new colleagues. One new teacher reported that she was "excited about the changes I have made this year, and will continue to make next year as a result" of her interaction with her mentor. In turn, our participant responded, "She really understood what I had been teaching her -- enough to make it her own, internalize the ideas and then try and innovation -- Wow!" When asked what was the most important thing that she had learned from Sammi, another young teacher replied, "She made me aware of the biases and stereotypes I didn't know I had." Similarly, Christy mentored several of her colleagues by inviting them to join her in making a national conference presentation on reading strategies. In retrospect, this colleague noted how much it meant to her to have had Christy's vote of confidence; with this shot of confidence, it reinvigorated her own teaching.

Many of the participants have also encouraged growth among their colleagues by organizing and leading in-house staff development opportunities. For example, teacher leaders created forums where teachers could gather to look at student work (LASW) together in an effort to better address the learning needs of their students. One of Elizabeth's colleagues reported that thanks to her leadership in organizing a LASW study group, she was able to "celebrate where my student work is and see what I need to do to help them get to the next level." By bringing teachers together and modeling an openness to share their cumulative wisdom and experience, these

teacher leaders empower their colleagues to learn and grow from one another.

In all of these cases, the participants' sense of empowerment, due to their classroom success with their own students, engendered a commitment to sharing these skills and knowledge with their colleagues. One participant, who is now a principal of an elementary school in her district, is trying to create for her staff the same kind of powerful professional learning opportunities that she has had -- the kind of experiences that foster greater expertise, collaboration, reflection, and the confidence and belief that one can make a difference in student learning. Thus, our data demonstrates that a sense of empowerment, in addition to the first three dimensions of our framework, is essential for teacher leaders to be able to affect change within their own practice and in the profession as a whole.

Conclusion

In this paper, we have tried to expand the conversation on teacher leadership by presenting a data-driven conceptualization of teacher leadership-in-action that captures the knowledge, skills, and dispositions of our sample. Our study reveals how expertise, collaboration, reflection, and empowerment are essential elements of teacher leadership. By following their career paths, we found that as they developed high levels of skill in each of these domains, these teachers emerged as leaders.

When we hypothesized at the outset of our data review that these four dimensions were the essential building blocks of teacher leadership, we did not know how these dimensions were linked to each other. While each of these teacher's careers have traveled different routes, filled with a variety of experiences, there are also common elements that suggest a developmental relationship among these four dimensions of teacher leadership. We now contend that expertise is the foundational dimension of teacher leadership, for it served to establish the credibility of these teachers as exemplars, which, thereby opened the door for them to function as instructional leaders. In the process of developing themselves as model teachers and as leaders, the majority of these teachers first solidified their knowledge of content and pedagogy, and distinguished themselves as excellent classroom teachers. This recognition led to even more powerful professional learning opportunities for these teachers, expanding their professional networks. While all of these teachers are life-long learners who continually strive to increase their expertise, there is evidence in their career journeys that substantial professional development experiences and formal education helped them reach a significant level of expertise before they assumed leadership roles. When those professional development experiences were on-going collegial learning experiences, they also fostered reflection and the development of collaboration skills. The combination of pedagogical and subject area expertise, reflection, and collaboration contributed to a growing sense of empowerment and to more extensive and prominent leadership roles.

While we were not fully able to articulate at the onset of the study what our teachers knew and were able to do, we knew that professional development opportunities were important to the development of these teachers' impressive capacities. Thus, in the final analysis it was no surprise that our data confirmed how professional development opportunities contributed greatly to the cultivation of our participants' expertise, their collaborative and reflective skills, and their sense of empowerment. However, we were struck by the depth and intensity of the consistently high

quality professional development experiences in which our ten teachers participated. Their extensive resumes are filled with powerful professional learning that has significantly contributed to nurturing their leadership potential.

The exceptional professional development offerings experienced by these teachers augmented their expertise by providing them opportunities to immerse themselves in an intensive exploration of a particular content area and to expand their pedagogical, curricular, and/or assessment knowledge. These experiences also provided participants with the opportunity to engage with both experts and colleagues around creating powerful learning experiences for students, thus fostering their collaborative skills. These intense learning experiences consistently pushed our participants beyond their comfort zones, stimulating reflection and innovation. For all of the participants, professional development opportunities proved seminal in the development of their competence in each of these four dimensions of teacher leadership.

Because of the richness of these professional development offerings, our teachers have grown enormously as classroom practitioners. They have, in turn, exhibited their leadership through attempting to replicate such experiences for their school colleagues at each of their sites. Clearly, professional development opportunities must play a prominent role in cultivating the leadership of rising teachers, and yet we cannot lose sight of how exceptional it is for teachers, such as our ten participants, to have had access to such rich and transformative professional learning experiences. In contract to the kinds of professional development opportunities that have been highlighted in this study, what counts as staff development for most teachers across the country in most public schools cannot be relied on to function as a catalyst for the improvement and growth of teaching and learning, let alone teacher leadership. Policy-makers and educational leaders who are working to dramatically improve student achievement recognize that the goals of standards reform cannot be achieved without the leadership of highly skilled classroom teachers. If they hope to develop the critical mass of teacher leaders who will be needed to reach these challenging goals, an important place to start will be to provide all teachers with more opportunities to participate in rigorous, content-rich, collegial professional development.

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